

**Western Montana Resource Advisory Council  
Minutes  
July 9, 2003  
Butte Field Office**

**Members Present:** Sue Marxer (Chair), Ted Coffman, Ben Deeble, Rob McCulloch, Susan Lenard, Roger Peters, Robin Urban, Dick Young, Pat Flowers and Robin Cunningham.

**Members Absent:** Garry Williams, Dennis Phillippi, Donna Tate McDonald, Mel Montgomery and Doug Abelin.

**BLM:** Rick Hotaling (Butte Field Manager), Nancy Anderson (Missoula Field Manager), Tim Bozorth (Dillon Field Manager), Marilyn Krause (Facilitator) and Cheryl Atkins (Notes).

**Guests:** Dick Fichtler (Missoula Field Office)

**Reminder:** September 10, 2003, Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative

The council convened at 9:00 a.m. with the facilitator covering introductions, ground rules, and agenda review.

**Addition to Agenda:** Upper Horse Prairie Decisions

**FIELD OFFICE OVERVIEWS:**

**Missoula Field Office (Nancy Anderson):**

**New Personnel:**

Range Management Specialist – Mike Tietmeyer reported for duty last month.  
Forestry Technician (vice – Wall) – announcement closes next week.

- We are continuing to work on our watershed assessments. We had anticipated a decision record being issued this fall for the Flint Creek environmental assessment (approximately 8,500 acres of BLM land in the Phillipsburg area) but it will probably be delayed due to coordination issues with the Forest Service. We are in the preliminary phases of work on the South Hoodoos watershed assessment (covers approximately 9,500 acres of BLM land). This field season we are continuing to implement projects from our three completed assessments (Elk Creek, Lower Blackfoot Corridor, and Murray-Douglas).
- The Linton Mine reclamation projection should go out for bid by the end of the month. We will be removing approximately 45,000 cubic yards of material to an on-site repository and 90,000 cubic yards to an off-site repository (about 5 miles north of the site). (Volumes are waste materials).
- We held three open houses to solicit public comments on Special Recreation Permit Management on the Blackfoot River. We will be discussing this issue later today.

- We should complete Phase II of our Belmont Creek restoration project today. This project is using draft horses to help place large woody debris in the creek.
- The Notice of Intent to amend our RMP to adopt the lynx conservation strategy was published. Our goal is to complete the amendment next year.

### **Butte Field Office (Rick Hotaling):**

#### **New Personnel:**

Fire Mitigation Education Specialist – Terina Mullen

- **Limestone Hills Withdrawal:** After briefing the members of the State Legislature from that area and the Broadwater and Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, we are moving forward with that. We are hoping to have the public scoping in the next couple of months. On completion of the public scoping we will be asking the RAC Subgroup to help address issues that will arise out of that scoping. The timeframe is to start the public scoping in the next couple of months and have the EIS finished within the next 18 to 24 months.
- **Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management Plan:** The record of decision and finding of no significant impacts was signed on March 3, 2003. We are waiting on the 30-day appeal period. Thanks to the RAC Subgroup that worked on the preferred alternative. The Forest Service has indicated their intention to start the Travel Management Process for the Whitetail-Pipestone area.
- **Butte RMP:** With the passing of the budget, we are expecting to start the plan revision. Due to the delay, we do not anticipate starting the public involvement process until later this fall.
- **Ward Ranch Exchange:** Still in progress. We anticipate completing the final phase of the exchange this fall.
- **Golden Sunlight Mine (GSM):** GSM has proposed a land exchange with BLM. GSM would exchange their land in the Doherty Mountain area near Cardwell and the Piedmont swamp area near Whitehall for BLM land within the mine boundary.

### **Dillon Field Office (Tim Bozorth):**

- **Fuels Projects:** We are continuing work on the Virginia City risk assessment mitigation plan (64,000 acres) Once complete, we will work on our NEPA analysis and proposed treatments of that area in 2005.
- **Watershed Assessments:** We are conducting watershed assessments in the Highlands and the North Ruby's and we will do the same process as Missoula FO where we will look at and make a determination of what we need to do and go into the NEPA analysis late this fall and next winter we will look at what we will do in the future.
- We are working on the NEPA for the Barton Gulch project which consists of timber harvest and prescribed burning to reduce fuels in that drainage. The project should be complete next year with implementation starting in 2005.
- A fire history study will start later this summer in the Centennials. We are looking at fire frequencies and intervals.
- **Sage Grouse Issues:** State of Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Plan is at the printer. BLM Sage Grouse Plan is conceptual and doesn't contain specifics.

- We completed an acquisition on the Beaverhead (about 80 acres surrounding the Pipe Organ property acquired several years ago between Clark Canyon and Dillon). There were some mining claims that were contiguous to the property as well as another piece right next to FWP fishing access sites. We are waiting for the closing on that.
- The Pipe Organ tract duck ponds are completed. We are not putting water in the ponds right now because of our concerns about downstream water needs so we are going to wait until this fall.
- The fire danger was raised to HIGH this week in southwestern Montana so we are on alert to see what's next. The feasibility report on Big Hole Battlefield exchange was signed last week.
- USFWS recommendation on the westslope cutthroat trout listing will come out in August. It was petitioned for listing and was denied and sent back to USFWS because they didn't adequately consider how to address dilution of genetic purity.
- We finished the Upper Horse Prairie decision resulting from our watershed assessment on those 50,000 acres. We received some protests and we are waiting to see if the final decision is appealed. The reason is the reopening of the pasture after it has been rested for 10 years.

The Gallatin Wildlife Association requested that the RAC consider if they want to discuss this at this meeting. I spoke with Marilyn and our agenda is full but we wanted to see if the RAC wants to talk about it at the September meeting.

**Question:**

Who is the point of contact for input on the BLM National Sage Grouse strategy plan?

**Answer:**

Roxanne Falise (Montana State Office) will be the POC. She has been involved with the discussions and that group.

**Update from all 3 Field Offices (Rick Hotaling):**

The RAC worked hard on the OHV plan for the Montana/Dakotas. The protests have been resolved and a record of decision was issued a couple weeks ago. We will start to implement the plan that we started in 1998.

We are still moving forward with the Statewide Fire Management Plan; it should be coming out very soon.

**Update on Dillon RMP (Tim Bozorth):**

We are still on target with the release of the Draft RMP, March 2004. We are working on the final adjustments on alternatives and starting to work on the analysis of impacts of the alternatives. We are beginning to write Chapter 4 (Impact Analysis). There's the "No Action" Alternative which is current management direction and three other alternatives. The Statewide OHV decision will be incorporated into the "No Action" Alternative. Recommendations that the

RAC gave us from the April meeting have been reviewed and we made sure the alternatives were consistent with those recommendations. There may be some instances in some alternatives where there are some variances such as where we had no aerial spraying in some locations based on resource concerns and the recommendation was to use all effective means for weed treatments. We still think they are pretty consistent with what the recommendations were.

The RAC had questions regarding Riparian Assessments and whether or not they considered geologic or hydrologic processes and they definitely do. There was a recommendation that we use 3<sup>rd</sup> party contracting for data collection.

Madison County has a concern regarding competitive sourcing and the potential effect on rural communities and economics by contracting out work that we typically do in-house.

There will be an updated news letter on the RMP next week. It will contain the general direction of the alternatives and also the RACs recommendations from the digest that came up in April and also to define a little better the RMP decisions verses project levels and contact information.

We are doing a social assessment; Joan Trent will be contacting each of the RAC members to explain what she is doing and set up interview times. There will be 67 people interviewed and the findings will go into the social impact section of the RMP. (Not exclusive of residents of Beaverhead and Madison Counties).

Tim will check with Joan Trent to see if she can e-mail the RAC members the questions she will be asking during her interview.

How does the RAC want to be involved in the Draft RMP Review? It will be released in March of next year, possible options for the RAC are:

- 1) Homework section during the 90-day comment period which will start in March and provide comments to BLM.
- 2) Host public meetings. Listen to comments from individuals and groups, what should be recommended to BLM
- 3) RAC members could come to public meetings that BLM hosts and make comments
- 4) Hold work sessions after the public comment period to review the comments received from the public and make recommendations to BLM on what changes you would like to see in the draft.

**\*Whatever you want to do, you don't have to make a decision right now. (Future agenda item)**

Sue M. -There has been a lot of debated issues of getting money for monitoring studies. Is the reason BLM is not getting monitoring done is because of getting money to do so?

Nancy A. – It was mentioned recently, a request from our state office to start putting our 2004 monitoring needs in our budget planning system.

### **Blackfoot River Special Recreation Permit Discussion (Dick Fichtler):**

- Handout, map of the Blackfoot River and slide show.

Dick went through a power point presentation with the RAC regarding Special Recreation Permits.

#### **Summary:**

The reason the BLM came out with Special Recreation Permits is because we wanted to respond to congressional inquiry's cost recovery, and we wanted to make sure there is a fair return to the taxpayer for special use of public lands. We had a bunch of new fee demo areas coming on line and needed to address how special recreation permits interfaced with fee areas. We also wanted to address group activities.

Our authority to do this comes from Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Land of Water Conservation Fund Act. A Fee Demo Program allows all the fees to come back to the hosting office so we get money back on the land where it was generated.

We received over 400 comments (national), most did not object to the proposed rule. 10-year permits are now finalized, which the National Outfitter/Guide organization liked; the limit before were 5-year permits.

**Special Recreation Permits (SRP's)** are: authorizations which allow recreation uses for public lands and related waters. They are there to control visitor use, protect the resources whether it's recreational or natural resources. We wanted to insure public health and safety and we needed a mechanism for accommodating legitimate commercial use of public lands.

#### **SRPs cover:**

- Commercial Use
- Competitive Use (ex. Canoe/Kayak races)
- Vending
- Special Area Use (fees already associated)
- Organized Group Activity/Event Use (ex. Boy Scout campouts, fraternity organizations)

Permits are not needed when the use is sponsored or co-sponsored by the BLM. When a competitive event is not commercial, complies with land use plans/designations, does not award cash prizes, not publicly advertised, poses no risk for damage and requires no monitoring.

We have over 30 years of collaborative efforts in the Blackfoot. In the early 1970s the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor was identified by private landowners. Landowners had concerns about increased use and asked the agencies what they were going to do about it. They all sat down together and the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor landowner's agreement was formed.

The Blackfoot Challenge organization has been in effect for a little over 10 years. It has extended its collaborative relationship all the way up the Blackfoot River, instead of the 26 miles

of recreation corridor; it's the whole 100 miles of the drainage. They work on water quality issues and fish habitat restoration.

Starting in 1995, FWP with a lot of help from BLM, started a public process of taking a look at recreation use on the Blackfoot, see where we're at, where we've come in the last 30 years and what are our issues today. In 2000, what came out of that process is the final Blackfoot River Recreation Management Direction. It's a guidance document; it was not analyzed through the NEPA process and no formal decision was made. All the agencies and private land owners were involved in developing this document. They broke the river into 6 distinct reaches; and suggested a basic recreation experience for each reach.

It was recommended that we needed to form a citizen advisory committee (like the RAC) that the FWP hosted and the Recreation Steering Committee (RecSteerCom) was formed. They have been working on the Blackfoot issues for a couple years. In 2000, the University of Montana did a user study funded by BLM, but the fire season closed the forests so we did not get the kind of data we were hoping for. However, we did get a lot of quality data on how people felt about their experiences on the Blackfoot. FWP with some support from BLM wrapped up a study last year on recreation uses.

Some of our management challenges that we are trying to address are:

- Exploding population in the Missoula area
- Competing demands for river resources
- Fragmented ownership patterns
- Visitor Succession

We just finished our public scoping process and we identified all the landowners through the Blackfoot Challenge along the river; we also wrote to the Board of Outfitters which in return sent us a list of outfitters that had listed the Blackfoot on their plan of operations (26) and we also hosted open houses in Missoula, Ovando and Helena and issued 2 press releases.

Some of the issues that were identified were:

- Ease of Administration
- Transferability
- How will allocation system work (problems with Historical Use?)
- Will there be a portion of the river with No Commercial Use?

The next step is to develop a draft management plan for SRPs. The draft plan will become the proposed action of the Environmental Assessment. The draft plan will define the process of issuing permits; identify how the permits will be administered; define when a permit is not needed; and the possibility of defining an allocation system for implementation at some future time when the need is defined.

We need to form an Interdisciplinary team for preparation of an EA. This is where the RAC comes in. A possible role for the RAC is: 1) as a group review the draft plan in a EA, 2) review it individually without the processes of the RAC, or 3) form a subcommittee. The subcommittee can be composed entirely of the RAC, or you can take advantage of the

RecSteerCom and designate them as the RACs subcommittee. We can also take some elements of the RAC and the RecSteerCom and form a subcommittee to help the Missoula FO with this.

Question:

Is there a document already produced by the RecSteerComm?

Answer:

No, there is only the River Management direction document. Some of the RecSteerComm helped develop the document.

Proposed:

\*What level of involvement is the RAC interested in?

Decision:

RAC designates RecSteerComm as a RAC Subcommittee for this issue.

Designate Robin Cunningham as a liaison on RecSteerComm as an information conduit rather than voting member of RecSteerCom. All recommendations as they apply to BLM need to be reviewed and ratified by RAC as a group.

**Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative (Dave Pacioretty):**

The initiative is to implement the Secretary's 4C's within the grazing program. Consultation, Coordination and Collaboration has been and currently is in our grazing regulations. The WO has tasked other field offices to participate in public meetings this spring to look at the initiative which will involve and develop new agency policy and they want to explore that under this initiative, can the concepts be implemented under the existing authority.

What does this mean for the RAC? In the interim before September 10<sup>th</sup>, a possibility is for the RAC to form a subgroup that we can review information as it comes along so you can be kept current. If information becomes available, we are going to receive public comments and the RAC as a group can review these public comments or you can choose not to; and essentially provide recommendations to the Director or choose not to.

Sue: Received a letter from the wrap-up of the meeting she attended in WO in April and there were several issues raised. The ones we focused on were 1) species management 2) weeds/landscapes. We had expected to have the preliminary work by this meeting. WO really wants the feedback and recommendations from the RAC. It was suggested to hold a public scoping meeting related to Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative. At the meeting in WO it was mentioned that the basic rules of the regulations still stand.

Debbie Barrett (Representative for State Legislature) has been behind the Sustained Wildlife Management. Debbie is interested in what happens with the Sustaining Working Landscapes and is hoping somehow the RAC will be working the FWP.

Comment:

If we are going through the scoping process, you need to notify the broader interested public not just the permittees.

Each FO is responsible for notifying their local constituents, like permittees. The BLM State Office is handling the state-wide interest groups.

Proposed:

\*Do we want to form a subgroup now? (Concern is the time frame before the September meeting) - Review the public comments

Recommendation:

WMRAC recommends a 60-day public comment period, followed by a minimum of 45 days for RAC to review public comments and make recommendations; cc to other RAC's in MT/DAKs and Mary Apple (State Coordinator).

Proposed:

\*Is there any interest from the RAC forming a subgroup once information is received?

Decision:

Hold off on the subgroup until at least the RAC sees the document and maybe form something at the September meeting and try to work through those issues at the meeting.

Question:

What is the progress of recreation planning on the Madison River in the Dillon Field Office?

Answer:

We were trying to set up a meeting in early June but it didn't work out because of people's commitments but we met with FWP and some of our SO people to try to figure out how we are going to do it. (basically the same thing as the Missoula FO is doing on the Blackfoot). There isn't the structure and history on the Madison as on the Blackfoot. The approach is very similar but we are not as far along as the Missoula FO. We are going to start on the lower river first (below the Beartrap Canyon down to Blacks Ford) and implement on that; then move to the upper river. We realize that we have to make this fit very closely with FWP and where things are going to go with the river management. We haven't had any scoping meetings yet.

We were hoping to try to get something up and running in 2004 for the lower river but I don't think that is going to happen. We talked a lot about a flat fee versus trying to simplify the fee formula like the Forest Service has and we came up with basically the same costs but it is on a per person per day basis versus trying to calculate 3% gross. We think we have concurrence on this point with our State Office.

**NEXT MEETING:** September 10, 2003. The meeting will be at the Dillon Search and Rescue Building, 1000 Highway 41 North, Dillon, Montana. Sustaining Working Landscapes.



**NEXT MEETING TOPICS:**

- How does RAC want to be involved in review of draft Dillon RMP? (decide before March 2004)
- Upper Horse Prairie Decision (Tim Bozorth)

**MEETING ADJOURNED** followed by field trip to High Ore Creek reclamation area and Sugarloaf Mountain reforestation project.